

## Chapter 5

### GREEK MIGRATION



Wedding picture of two young immigrants from Greece  
Hanna, Wyoming, USA, 1912

(For a better understanding of the words *migration*, *emigration* and *immigration* see Appendix A Glossary, pp.145-148).

Soon after the Greek nation was established there was an extensive migration of Greeks to the newly established free Greek nation. Some came with their whole family, including all their brothers with their wives and children. Some did not move their families, but they sent their children to schools of free Greece. The schools of the capital of Greece, Nauplion, were flooded with students from all parts of Greece which were still under foreign rule.

In the 1830's when the Greek nation was established it consisted of a small part of what is Greece today. Gradually more lands were added to Greece. (See history map chapter 3, p.52.) Consequently if a person was moving to the newly established nation of Greece from a place that was under foreign rule, this person was considered an immigrant.

For example: If a person went from Crete to Athens in 1887 he/she was considered an immigrant.

On the other hand if a person went from Nauplion to Volos in 1840, he/she would need a passport. We also need to keep in mind that for immigrants who came to the U.S.A. from parts of Greece that were still under foreign rule at the time those people emigrated, the passenger lists, or other lists of immigrants, do not have "Greece" as their place of origin.

For example: Those who came from Thessaloniki [Salonika] in 1910 were listed as coming from "Turkey," and those who came from the island of Rodos [Rhodes] in 1930 they were listed as coming from Italy.

The reason that made Greeks leave their country was neither political nor religious persecutions, (with the exception of Greeks from Asia Minor and other parts of Turkey who emigrated because of ethnic persecution). Greece was faced with great financial problems. Many citizens left their homeland in an attempt to live a better life, and to help financially those family members who remained in the homeland. Some went to Europe, others to Egypt, South Africa,

Australia, and most of them went to the U.S.A. The peak of emigration was during the first and second decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is clearly illustrated by the table shown on this page.

Greeks have been leaving their homeland for the new world since colonial times, usually as sailors, merchants, or miners. Only rarely did these early emigrants settle permanently. Greek residents are a comparatively recent addition to America. At the close of the Civil War there were less than a hundred Greeks in the United States. It wasn't until the 1890's that substantial Greek communities were established in the United States. Reports of job opportunities in America started a wave of emigration to the new world in the 1880s. The earliest emigration was from the Peloponnesus, then from Central Greece, Crete, the Ionian Islands, the Dodecanese Islands, Turkey, Cyprus, and the Balkan countries. A great portion of the immigrants who came to the U.S.A. from Greece came from the Peloponnesus area of the mainland.



The number of emigrants grew slowly up until 1900 and thereafter grew very rapidly, reaching a peak in about 1910. Most departed Greece for North America. But some went to Russia, Egypt, South Africa, and Australia. By 1910, an estimated one-quarter to one-fifth of the total labor force of Greece had left.

The number of immigrants that came to the U.S.A from Greece between 1820-1979

<u>Time period</u>	<u>Immigrants</u>
1820-1829	29
1830-1839	53
1840-1849	39
1850-1859	31
1860-1869	143
1870-1879	405
1880-1889	3,612
1890-1899	19,939
1900-1909	208,661
1910-1919	239,021
1920-1929	69,678
1930-1939	9,202
1940-1949	9,150
1950-1959	39,142
1960-1969	71,818
1970-1979	71,440

In the early 1920's as a result of the retreat of the Greek armed forces from Asia Minor (see Chapter 3, p.53) more than 1.3 million Greek **refugees** from Turkey (Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, and Pontus) poured into Greece. Those refugees brought with them **records** of genealogical value which have been microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, and are available through the Family History Library cataloged under Turkey. A small number of those who fled Turkey went to Egypt or other countries, and even to America. Those who came to Greece settled mainly in Athens, Halkis, Greek Macedonia, and Eastern Thrace. They became residents of the cities in which they settled, and their names were added to the Town Registers as Supplemental recordings, “Συμπληρωματικά” [Sympliromatika].

With the Greeks also many Armenian refugees came to Greece. The Armenian community in Greece kept their own records of the Armenians. Some of these records have

been microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, and are available through the Family History Library.

In 1914 the United States had received 35,832 Greek immigrants. Immigration to the United States practically stopped after 1924 when restrictive immigration quotas were applied. After that time Greeks began emigrating more to other countries, such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa. Today Greeks are found in great numbers in Australia, called by some the largest of the Greek islands.

These Greek emigrants did not all come from Greece. During the time of greatest emigration more than half of the Greek people were living outside of Greece, mainly in surrounding Turkish territory, in the Balkan countries, or in Egypt. At times these areas contributed large numbers of Greek emigrants, although most Greeks who immigrated to the New World came from Greece itself.

The first emigrants were males, between ages eighteen to thirty-five. These were mostly single men, and married men without their wives and children. They came mostly from the rural areas of their country. Few women emigrated until about 1905. Young women, especially after the First World War, left for the New World, marrying husbands in a country where Greek women were in short supply, and dowries not required.

Until the 1920s, the majority of the emigrants were unskilled males from small villages. Most of the early emigrants had never been far from their home villages before leaving. Most knew little about the country to which they went and could not speak English. Those who came from Turkey in this early time period tended to be better-educated and more often from cities. After the Second World War, emigrants included many well educated and professionally trained people and larger numbers of women.

During the years before the First World War, most of the emigrants expected to return to Greece with the money they saved in the U.S. Almost half of them eventually did just that. Some made the trip back and forth to Greece several times before deciding to stay in the New World. Between 1899 and 1924, the number of Greeks who departed from the United States amounted to forty-eight percent of those arriving. American prosperity, Americanized children, and political and economic problems in Greece prompted many to give up thoughts of resettling in Greece.

Greek emigrants, although usually from rural Greece, moved to the cities in the New World. They began working in textile mills, tanneries, slaughterhouses, coal mines, steel mills and on railroad construction. Many worked in Greek-owned restaurants, fruit and vegetable stands, and other small businesses that required minimal capital outlay and simple skills. Many who came from islands settled in Florida where they fished and dove for sponges.

Greeks established Greek-Orthodox churches whenever their numbers became great enough. Until the Greek parish was established, most Greeks associated themselves with whatever Eastern Orthodox churches were already established in the area, such as Russian Orthodox. The establishment of a Greek church was an important event in the Greek community. The church was the cultural and social heart of the community. The church helped the Greek people maintain their cultural identity, even offering Greek language classes for American born children.



